

Functional/Discourse

The Korean topic marker *nun* revisited: *nun* as a tying device

Previous research on ‘topic’ has touched on a variety of functional and interactional properties of topicality which shed light on the discourse function of the Korean topic marker *nun* (and its variant *un*), such as ‘aboutness’ (Halliday 1967, Reinhart 1982), ‘givenness’ (Firbas 1964, Chafe 1976), or ‘domain-setting’ (Chafe 1976, Haiman 1978, Lee 1986). Most of the previous studies, however, do not examine in detail how the *nun*-marked referent is grounded by and linked to the prior context, only noting its tendency to be given, known, or presuppositionally backgrounded (Hwang 1981, Lee 1986).

From a conversation-analytic perspective (Sacks *et al.* 1974), this paper focuses on the interactional process through which the use of *nun* is sequentially shaped (Heritage 1984), examining how *nun* is sequentially positioned and how its use is warranted by virtue of being ‘tied’ to the prior context (Sacks 1992). Various types of tying operations involving *nun* are analyzed in terms of the practice of formulating the prior context as the one that motivates the current action (Kim 2001). For instance, *nun*-marked referents are often tied to a previously mentioned referent via the same ‘membership category’ and distinct but mutually relevant ‘category-bound activities/states’ (Sacks 1972) (see example (1)). *Nun*-utterances also tend to serve as a meta-linguistic or meta-action comment whose ‘motivated’ affective valence displayed toward the prior context constitutes the upshot of the current action (see examples (2) and (3)) (cf. Ochs & Schieffelin 1983).

These features of *nun*-utterances, which are constitutive of their use as an on-line parenthetical insert or side-sequenced evaluation (cf. Jefferson 1972), furnish the speaker with a resource for shifting the frame in the manner of marking a temporary time-out in the on-going interaction in order to deal with the prior context (Goffman 1974). Closely associated with this practice of using *nun* as a tying device is the sense in which the speaker of *nun*, by virtue of the interactional need to deal with the prior context, is designedly and warrantably bringing up what is ‘unmentionable,’ i.e., something that could have been left unmentioned (e.g., because of its shared nature) or something that could have been brought up by the other speaker. Various semantic and functional features traditionally associated with *nun*, such as givenness or genericness, are shown to be some of the ‘static’ aspects of this dynamic and intersubjectively attuned interactional process enacted by *nun*, through which the prior context is dwelt upon and dealt with in an obliquely counteractive or elaborative fashion (cf. Kim 2001).

Examples

(1) (N & H)

((Following N's story about how his parents overreacted to an incident involving his child, H resumes his story about how his grandfather overreacted to an incident in which his relative hurt her hand.))

- H: *kulay wuli halapeci -nun, (.)* ((several lines omitted)) "ku ecce -taka keki -ta son -ul neh so our grandfather-TOP that do how-TRANS there-LOC hand-ACC put in -ess -ulka, ecce -taka son -ul neh -ess -ulka/a," *kyeysok ku cilmwun -i -si -e.* -PST-INQ do how-TRANS hand-ACC put in-PST-INQ continuously that question-COP-HONOR-IE "So, **my grandfather**, he keeps saying, 'How come she put her hand in there? How come she put her hand there in the first place?'"

(2) (TA Meeting)

((Talking to a group of conversationalists including Mr. Kim Sangho))

- W: *hangsang kim sangho -ssi-nun cwunpi -ka toy -e -iss -e.* always Kim Sangho-Mr.-TOP preparation-NOM become-CONN-exist-IE "Mr. Kim Sangho always has things ready in his mind."

(3) (Campus Talk)

H: *kim kyoswunim chayk-ey cal nawa -iss -nuntey.* Kim Professor book-LOC well come out-exist-CIRCUM "It is well explained in Prof. Kim's book."

- S: *caseyhi-nun,* in detail-TOP "Not in detail, though."

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